

### Diverging patterns of informalization between endogenous and exogenous economic actors in the East-German transformation process: results from a case-study in the IT-branch in Berlin-Brandenburg

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## **Anna Schwarz**

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**Diverging patterns of informalization between endogenous and exogenous economic actors in the East German transformation process -  
Results from a case-study in the IT-branch in Berlin-Brandenburg**

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## **Preface**

The first years of the transformation processes in the Central East European Countries (CEECs) instigated many social scientific analyses about the institutional change in the political and economic systems. Later, it became more and more obvious that these new institutions would need a longer and deeper embedding process, than first expected, into the everyday life attitudes, the expectations and mentalities of the people. In this context, a certain amount of scientific attention shifted to a consideration of the relationship between the formal and informal social ties and interactions in these countries. In October 1998, an international conference at Potsdam provoked an interdisciplinary debate about the “transformation of the informal in the CEECs.” The following observation will contribute to this debate, which concentrates on the East German transformation case and on the sphere of economic interaction in an innovative and rapidly changing branch - informational technology. The presented results are based on a research project focused on the cooperation and networking attitudes of different types of new entrepreneurs in this branch in the region Berlin-Brandenburg.

## **1. Introduction**

Many of the previous examinations into the phenomenon of the informality of socio-economic relationships and its transformation in the Central and East European reform countries dealt with a theoretical, general level or with a country-specific, sometimes a comparative country analysis. If we consider the local transformations as windows for globalization, as openings to the world market, with the problems of interaction between endogenous and exogenous, native and foreign economic actors, then an investigation of this phenomenon gains both theoretical and practical significance.

In respect to the East German transformation, these problems become intimately connected with the East and West German economic actors because of an extreme-case scenario concerning the balances of power, the distribution of the chance-structures, and the density of interaction between the local and new, and endogenous and exogenous. Furthermore, this special case depicts a particular sharpness of diverging patterns of perception, interpretation and behavior and also quickly forced reciprocal learning processes between these two types of actors. Indeed, there is this extensive shaping in all transformation societies or will be in the future even more extensive

because of enlarging joint-ventures and economical interaction (*Verflechtungen*) of national and international actors in the other reform societies.

An important observation is the relationship between formalized and informalized economic activities or arrangements, especially in the case of founding and establishing firms and firm networks, not only in the transformational eastern societies, but also in developed western economies since these types of economies are considered the future models to which the transformational societies aspire. These are highly sensitive phases and spheres in which personal relationships, interpersonal networks, trust, and the expectation of reciprocity are indispensable to the consolidation of a dynamic economic potential (Loose/Sydow 1994). In this part of the economic process we can thoroughly investigate the multiple combinations, interweavings, and transitions (*Übergänge*) within the spheres of the formal and the informal as well as among formalized and informalized institutional arrangements. Here I would like to follow the focus and the understanding of Michael Brie, that "it has to be kept in mind, that (the theoretical differentiation and classification) regards formal and informal institutional arrangements as extremes in a wide continuum of social ties - more or less formalized or informal" (Brie 1999: 4).

The dimension of informal arrangements includes the main, more comprehensive, and long term valid mechanisms and conditions for entrepreneurial success, especially in the process of founding, establishing, and enlarging a single firm, concrete, new enterprise or firm network (not the market institutions as a whole). On the other hand, formal institutional arrangements of enterprises or firm networks (written regulars of institutionalization, cooperation contracts, juridical agreements) usually follow informal arrangements; only represent fluid, short time agreements, which can be altered according to changing external or internal constellations. So far, the formalization processes give a certain kind of stability for certain periods and conditions. The ongoing, parallel, existing, and increasing informal (inside and outside) activities, however, guarantee flexibility, innovation, correction, and adaptation, and they allow development in the long run. Following this point of view, not only are the informal activities themselves are astonishing or under suspicion (in the case of the Russian Mafia), but also the embeddedness of the informal in the formal institutions, common rules, and normative sets deserve public and scientific attention.<sup>1</sup> In this way, not only should the use of personal networks, ties, and relationships, nor the pursuit unwritten regulars and elaborating hidden activities (more or less hidden from the public) be astonishing and worth scholarly scrutiny in transformational pro-

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<sup>1</sup> This should be also of interest for the western societies. For example, in Germany exists a new law from May 1, 1998 concerning the regulation of the capital and personal networks in enterprises, which limits the number of posts in supervisory boards of different enterprises to maximum 10 votes of a single person. This will guarantee more control and transparency in the highly connected personal networks, the German type of "cooperative capitalism," a dominant model in German major and traditional industries. See Windolf/Schief 1999: 268.

cesses, but the limits on these kinds of activities, the mechanisms of public control, those that are stabilized and reproduced concretely accepted social norms, patterns, and attitudes of informalization, should also be examined. The latter aspect can be analyzed by qualitative sociological observations of economic action. That is why I would like to use the term "patterns of informalization" to focus on the preceding aspect of this kind of social action, which is highly embedded in normative sets, forms of tacit knowledge, unwritten regulars, and latent sense structures valid for the involved actors, groups or milieu.

This focus follows a certain understanding of the informal itself. Indeed, I would like to follow here once more Michael Brie's definition, that "an informal institutional arrangement is the result of a strategy of first choice (and sometimes of last resort) for individuals pursuing their urgent private interests" (Brie 1999: 5). According to this approach, informal arrangements are primarily concerned with the individual priorities of action and interaction, depending on and framed in normative sets. Therefore, what should be of interest here is how different actors in transformation societies behave in accordance to relevance structures in economic action. As an interesting field of study, an inquiry that looks deeper into the differentiating patterns of informalization and diverging entrepreneurial priorities at different actor groups in transitional societies should consider the new, flexible, innovative branch of informational technologies (IT). In this branch two characteristic points are often mentioned or almost expected: the necessity of cooperation, networking, and even trustful interpersonal relationships as well as the relatively open chance structures for small and medium enterprises and newly established firms. That is why this IT-branch in the East German transformation case shall be here my field of reference in the following remarks.

The East-German process of transformation is regarded as being an exception (compared to its CEECs neighbors) particularly because of the dominating path of transformation, the institutional transfers, and the adaptation of a "ready made state". The weakness of the endogenous actors of the transformation in the new federal states (NFS) can be seen as a disadvantage to this advantage. (Reissig 1999: 133, 137) Currently, the majority of transformation studies explain that the weakness of the endogenous participants is mainly with the broad exchange of elites (the higher levels of politics, administration, economy, science, partly media). Another central topic is the absence or weakening of authentic political movements and organizations (with the exception of the PDS). The here presented results try to take a closer look at another aspect which can also describe and explain the weakness of the endogenous actors in the East-German transformation case: the problematic networking of new economic actors, which emerge from diverging objective chance structures but also from diverging subjective priorities in entrepreneurial action. Concentrating the linkages between these two aspects, qualitative sociological analyses can help to explain the diverging patterns of informalization between endogenous and exogenous

actors (and for the East-German case: the lack of reciprocity in interaction between them).

Yet, policy elites are repeating the theme that noticeable economic and social development in the New Federal States can be expected through the dynamic process of foundations of small and medium sized East-German businesses. Here, the beginnings of solution to structural and regional unemployment could be discovered. This solution should also offer new scopes for establishing and networking of new endogenous entrepreneurs in the highly dynamic and flexible area of innovative foundations in East Germany.

This hope is particularly strong in the new federal state of Brandenburg, particularly since 1990 the number of working places of the industry was reduced by about 80% (see Maretzke/Irmen 1999). The capacities of research and development (R&D) were reduced by more than 70%. The qualified potential, a vast majority from the former large, now disbanded academic research centers or from the R&D-departments of the state organized enterprises or large concerns, moved out of their professions, partly left unexploited and unemployed, or formed, at least, a hypothetical resource for self-employment. In the meantime, hope, which has been placed in the first graduates of the new universities and colleges, is raised in getting a new generation of innovative entrepreneurs. In this situation we find a lot of similarities between East Berlin and Brandenburg, but also strong, productive traditional networks connecting West Berlin to the old Federal States. At the same time, there does exist a lot of linkages between Berlin and Brandenburg, a rising number of Western Berlin firms (and of people, too) settled down in the surrounding area of Berlin (in so called "*Speckgürtel*"). In a certain economic sense, this region Berlin-Brandenburg should be studied as a common region because it still remains divided politically and administratively. Thus, the region Berlin-Brandenburg can become an interesting research area for several reasons: it is one of the (rare) dynamic economic regions in the New Federal States, but characterized by great internal disproportions (the near surrounding of Berlin as a Mega city, as the new German capital, can profit from the political and economic dynamism, whereas peripheral areas suffer from their traditional agrarian structure, which today leads to a high degree of unemployment and economic weakness)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> To have a look at the economic proportions between these two parts of the research region see the following data from 1998:

	Brandenburg	Germany	Berlin
Inhabitants (Mio)	2.554	82.012	3.459
Density of population (inhabitants per km <sup>2</sup> )	87	230	3.883
Rate of unemployment (%)	18,9	12,7	17,3
GNP per capita (DM)	29.000	44.400	45.200

Source: Statistisches Jahrbuch des Landes Brandenburg 1998

The following “contribution?” is focused on the same time torn (*zerklüftet*) and common region. It deals with *real opportunity structures* of the new market (the field of informational technology) as well as with *diverging patterns of interpretation and action* of the involved endogenous and exogenous economic actors (specifically regarding the founders of new, small and medium sized IT-enterprises), and it *tries to use these two aspects for explaining the diverging attitudes of informalization* found in this region and branch, especially diverging among East and West German entrepreneurs.

Thus, it should follow a theoretical approach which could focus on the mediation, the linkages between the level of structure and the level of action: such a theoretical approach is reflected in the structure theory of Anthony Giddens, “especially” the research interest concerning real dominance structures in each investigated field of action (including the concrete mediation facilities for establishing such domination structures), as well as the interest in interpretative schemata which are used by the participating individuals to perceive, interpret and judge their own behavior, the behavior of others, and the manner by which they communicate. (Giddens 1992)

The presented results here are “special?” aspects of a common project with Dr Mathias Weber, titled "Cooperative competencies of entrepreneurs in the informational technology (IT) industry - potentials for establishing innovative milieu in the economic region of Berlin-Brandenburg?"<sup>3</sup> We tried in this project to use the Giddens' approach to study domination structures and interpretation schemes; that latter aspect included additional hermeneutical methods for reconstructed latent sense structures, latent patterns of perception, interpretation, and action ("*Deutungsmuster*") within the behavior mentality?) of IT-entrepreneurs<sup>4</sup>.

Our mentioned research project is laid out as a qualitative case study, based on a specific contrast group design: those questioned were about 50 male (two female) entrepreneurs in partly standardized interviews. Each of them founded an IT-

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<sup>3</sup> This project has been supported by the DFG (German Society for the Advancement of Scientific Research) at the Frankfurt Institute of Transformation Studies at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder) in 1997/98.

<sup>4</sup> See here the methodological approach of the "*Deutungsmuster*"-analysis, following the concept of the objective hermeneutic by Ulrich Oevermann, and also the consensus positions concerning "*Deutungsmuster*" from Meuser, Sackmann et al. They regard "*Deutungsmuster*" (patterns or schemes of interpretation, of "constructing sense") as common divided (not individual, but typical for groups or milieus) patterns of common sense, latent sense structures, of theories of the every-day-life (Soeffner: "*Alltagstheorien*"), as regulars for action, formed by socialization and stabilized by longer individual and collective experiences, as implicit, latent, hidden patterns of interpretation of and dealing with newly arising problems, patterns, which are relatively stable, and which have to be reconstructed during a interpersonal research process and to be brought from the implicit level of subconsciousness to an explicit level. (Meuser/Sackmann 1991, Soeffner 1989, Oevermann 1993).



enterprise<sup>5</sup> between 1990 and 1993 in the region of Berlin-Brandenburg. At that time they belonged to an age group between 30 and 40 years and differed in the following contrast groups: a) settling of the enterprise in Berlin or Brandenburg; b) East-German versus West-German socialization; c) the visible and invisible in cooperation-networks; and d) successful versus failed entrepreneurs. The recorded interviews, which lasted from one to two hours, are completely transcribed, analyzed regarding to the explicit experiences of cooperation, and have partly been interpreted hermeneutically (the latter being interesting for latent patterns of perception of networking, cooperation and informalization).

Following the latter hermeneutical approach, we tried to look without a special expectation or hypothesis into the recorded texts and reconstruct from them repeating patterns of interpretation in the economic activity of our entrepreneurs and then to prove or disprove these patterns.

Concerning the here interesting question of informalization attitudes in the entrepreneurial activities we found the clearest types, the sharpest differences in our contrast-group design, according to the divergent frames or types of socialization, e.g. between East German versus West German IT-entrepreneurs. What here, in the transformational context, is identified with endogenous and exogenous actors. Astonishing is the result that the stronger attitude to use interpersonal networks and informal arrangements can be found in our sample at the entrepreneurs socialized in West Germany. The east German IT-founders tried firstly to use the new formal institutions, which has often been connected with disappointing experiences.

These results will be elaborated in the following three dimensions: Firstly, illustrated in our sample are repeating attitudes of informalization as a part of the entrepreneurial action in the new IT-branch; secondly, these attitudes are connected with the objective chance structures and dominating types of networks (which can be seen in a certain way as results of informalization and formalization attitudes); and, thirdly, the hermeneutical attempt explains the diverging patterns and results of informalization by diverging latent sense structures or relevance structures in entrepreneurial action between endogenous and exogenous actors.

## **2. Diverging experiences and attitudes of informalization**

This part of results sum up the repetition in various interviews explicitly formulated experiences and attitudes of informalization according to the mainly contrasting groups of West and East German IT-entrepreneurs. Diverging between them patterns

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<sup>5</sup> As IT-field are regarded in the following such enterprises which concentrate on information processing technology, software, communication technology, microelectronics, industrial electronics and media technology. Consumer electronics and office technology are left aside on behalf of their minor significance in Eastern Germany until now.

of informalization concerned mainly two levels: firstly, it concerned the main topics (goals and objects) of informalization attitudes along to the process of foundation and establishment firms, cooperative structures or firm networks, secondly, it concerned the communication structures and (symbolic) forms of establishing and evaluating personal networks.

The first level of diverging patterns can be studied in nearly all phases of the entrepreneurial action, beginning from the first idea of founding an enterprise until the most established forms of firms and firms-networks. What differs between East and West German entrepreneurs are not only the main goal of informalization (and formalization) attitudes, but also the topic, the objective of these kinds of social action.

When most of our West German interviewees explained their first steps of creating their enterprise in the IT-branch in Berlin or Brandenburg, they described their temptations to evaluate the quality of their personal relationships and important entrance-points at the new market. Only if they had close contacts to economic-political elites, or to important institutions or to great, solvent clients or to just established partners; consequently, then they chose to settle down in the New Federal States. In the ongoing process of firm-development, these kinds of personal networks remain important to realize the main goal of entrepreneurial activity: to enter into the new market and earn long-term valid client relations.

In the foundation stories of our East German interviewees the primary concern was the self-evaluation of the technical quality of their product, the question if their technical or technological solution would be good enough to establish their own firm. Secondly, they went through the official, formalized institutions (*Förderinstitutionen*) that support new entrepreneurs and acquire additional credits for developing their technical solution. There were plenty of cases where East German founders did not get any support, not because of the technical quality, but because of the weakness of their marketing concepts, and sometimes a lack of any feasible explanation. (Maybe, the formal way through this kind of institutions is not enough to be successful in acquiring financial support in the early steps of a firms foundation.) If they succeed, however, and establish their firms, East Germans tend to think about their next steps (in networking or cooperating) and follow the primary goal of producing good quality and formulate functioning solutions. In order to attain success, they must depend on personal networks with former colleagues or friends (from the same branch) and try to re-activate them if they are profitable in a scientific and technical sense. Thus, only a few of the old personal relationships and old social ties become used and appear useful. Therefore, only a part of the social capital becomes "productive" for the new conditions.

This selection of social ties is concerned with the profile of businesses and the interruption of political ties in the transformation context. East German entrepreneurs find few links and cooperation partners because of the later beginning differentiation of

firms' profiles (after a first phase of increased competition among similar enterprises, which can be seen as an inheritance of the GDR-monostructure), as well as through wide rotation of the elite (in favor for West German experts) in regional administrations and economic-political institutions. Personal relationships have been used more intensively for recruiting own team-members instead of forming cooperative relationships with other East German enterprises. However, West German entrepreneurs in the Berlin-Brandenburg area partly profit from the emigration of West German partial elites and use intensively their long-term personal relationships as an entrance into a new market segment.

During the ongoing processes of firms' stabilization, cooperation and networking we found another difference between East German and West German entrepreneurs. It concerns the point and the object, again, of transition from informal to formal arrangements, especially in cooperation networks. However, both groups of actors acquired the experience that not all that is written down helps to stabilize and make real functioning cooperation. Also both groups made positive experiences by starting up co-operations with smaller testing projects and, later, by formalizing long term relationships (which is an argument, too, for the ongoing dimension of informalization during the whole firms development process). But, what differs between them is the point when they would like to formalize agreements. In this sense, the western entrepreneurs' critical perception of the concerning the behavior of East German partners in formalizing co-operations was remarkably clear because the West Germans emphasized the importance to clarify the conditions of sharing the profit in the cooperation and to fix these shared mechanisms just before going into the concrete cooperative relationship. Conversely, the East Germans emphasized the common solution function and the question of whether the product will be accepted by the clients or not. Only afterwards would they begin to think about formalizing the win-sharing mechanisms. (This also characterizes models of East-East cooperation and could possibly explain their weakness, as well).

At a second level, we found repetitive differences in the attitudes of informalization between our exogenous and endogenous actors: this level concerns the structures, places and sometimes symbolic forms of communication between each other, within in the new branch, and the market. Again, however, common experiences exist that direct interpersonal relationships and are always seen as an important condition for starting up economic relationships or cooperations. Western interviewees named it "the chemistry has to function between future partners," while eastern interviewees called it "to be on the same wavelength".

In fact, what sounds very similar here is how and where, in different experiences and expectations, one builds trustful interpersonal relationships. For the western entrepreneurs the main field to acquire, develop, and evaluate personal relationships is the process of familiarizing themselves with the personality of the potential partner(s) in either public or leisure contexts and to acquaint themselves with their pri-

vate interests, opinions and abilities. To belong to a certain milieu, club or scene, for them, serves as a first indicator of trustworthiness. The West German entrepreneurs tend to organize informally in kinds of order or corporation associations (in the Max Weberian sense of "*Stände*"), while the East Germans did not have such experiences or attitudes because of their former socialization. They familiarized themselves with professional contacts, an exchange of technical know-how, because of the politically and socially homogenized former society and had neither the attitudes nor the means of self- or milieu- stylizations. Thus, the eastern pattern or attitude of "distinction through professionalism" stands beside the western pattern of "distinction through belonging to the useful and accepted corporation".

Until now it seems that there are only slow or few tendencies to overcome this special lack of reciprocity in building up personal relationships.

### **3. Diverging chance structures and types of networks in the IT-branch in Berlin-Brandenburg**

Now the mentioned attitudes of informalization or formalization should be correlated with the main market structures in the IT-branch. These market structures, on the one hand, can be seen as results of entrepreneurial interaction, a certain result of formalization and informalization; but, on the other hand, these structures function as framework, as objective conditions, given prerequisites for the individual economic action for each single enterprise. That latter aspect matters especially when following the focus on the foundation process of new firms.

The IT-branch in the region Berlin-Brandenburg represents a very mobile, subtly differentiated, and only partly lucid scene. One has to consider not only a rapid process of firms foundations, and cooperation and networking activities, but also a strong battle for this new field, which produces an important number of bankruptcies or paths into dependent forms of labor and market division under the hierarchy of exogenous strategic networks. What should be thoroughly studied is the sense in which this innovate branch will follow the former German model of "cooperative capitalism" (Windolf/Schief 1999), characterized by strong personal and capital ties and networks between great, market dominant companies. In spite of the flexibility and innovative orientation of the IT-branch, the actual picture for the region Berlin-Brandenburg shows indeed strong domination structures by huge global players highly active in different strategies of networking, of informal and formal arrangements for developing and controlling the market.

The IT-key-players in the conurbation Berlin-Brandenburg are mainly nationally or internationally operating large firms (like SIEMENS, Nixdorf, Debis, Alcatel/SEL, Hewlett Packard, Deutsche Telekom etc.). Close, partly long-term, personal relationships exist in the (West) Berlin area between the key enterprises and scientific

and economic-political elites (Technical University, Fraunhofer Institute, Technology Foundation Berlin, and others).

Of particular importance in the 90's are here those initiatives and networks that had been created in preparation of the merger of the federal states of Berlin and Brandenburg. These have been accompanied by economic-policy initiatives. The failure of the merger of the states in 1996 had a smaller impact on the effectiveness of the networks in Berlin than on those in Brandenburg. At the same time, both regions developed their own separate momentum. Some of the more important of these kinds of activities will be mentioned here as examples of the overlapping between formalized and informalized activities and institutions in this regional IT-branch.

The initial *common initiative of the federal states* "Telecommunications 2001 Berlin/Brandenburg (Telekommunikation 2001 Berlin/Brandenburg)" pursued very ambitious aims and wanted to rely on common political-economic initiatives to change the region Berlin-Brandenburg into a modern, internationally leading location and support the population on the way to an information-society. But, what actually emerged from this is the Berlin-dominated project, or better stated, a loose-coupled network with the title "ProTIME" (T stands for telecommunications, I for information technology, M for media, E for entertainment). Market leaders like Siemens, debis, Alcatel, SEL, IBM, Deutsche Telekom AG and others (see present members of ProTIME. in figure 1)<sup>6</sup> are involved together with public scientific institutions.

Figure 1: ProTIME members (as of 1997)

Alcatel/SEL	BB-DATA	BerliNet GmbH
Bosch Telecom GmbH	CCSC	Debis Systemhaus sfi GmbH
DeTeBerkom	Deutsche Telekom AG	EDS
Helsinki Telephone Company	Hewlett Packard	IBM
Infopark online services	ITAG	Pixelpark Multimedia-Agentur AG
PSI	Reuters AG	SGI
SIBB e.V.	Siemens AG	Siemens Nixdorf
Silicon Graphics	UBIS	VW Gedas
Virtuelles Softwarehaus	Amerika-Gedenkbibliothek	ITW
LIT	Technologiestiftung Berlin	

At no time, has ProTIME been applied to small and medium-sized businesses (as it can be noticed by the relatively high annual subscription fee), yet it seems to offer now small and medium-sized businesses some possibilities to establish partial co-operations. East German new firms and enterprises from Brandenburg are not presently represented in ProTIME.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.pro.time.com>

A similar picture shows the society for the promotion of the medium sized software-industry in Berlin and Brandenburg (Software-Industrie in Berlin und Brandenburg e.V., SIBB), which has been created at the end of 1993 by 12 software and computer retailers as a professional association of the medium sized software industry. This organization is also a member participating in ProTIME. A closer examination shows that the enterprises from Brandenburg participating in SIBB have been transferred from the Western parts of Berlin to the surrounding area of Brandenburg.

Since 1997, a new network initiative out of the SIBB, the "*virtual software house*" (*Virtuelles Softwarehaus*, VSWH) is to be developed. The VSWH participation is henceforth called the Berlin initiative "*Project future - the Berlin way into the information society (Projekt Zukunft - der Berliner Weg in die Informationsgesellschaft)*". The technology foundation Berlin (*Technologiestiftung* Berlin, TSB) promoted VSWH with one million DM; the remaining 11 involved project partners raised about the same amount. Within the "*Berliner Projekt Zukunft*" are also represented relevant scientific institutions, but currently only a few East German new foundations are among the members. How the Berlin "*Projekt Zukunft*" is opened for entrepreneurs from Brandenburg is another point of discussion.

The above relevant network initiatives from Berlin in the branch of business indicate close personal interconnections and intersections that rely partly on relationships and experiences of co-operations that had developed for years or for decades. To achieve entrance proves to be extremely difficult for East German founders and most of the IT-enterprises from Brandenburg. General problems in establishing<sup>7</sup> the East-German firms are, in addition, intensified by specific branch barriers that block of entrance into the IT-market (dominance of worldwide active enterprises on the market, orientation of clients on more complex solutions) as well as by real economic-policy dominated structures and the drifting of Berlin apart from Brandenburg.

Thus, in the IT-field, because of its flexibility and innovative orientation, we find similar results which have been noticed by G. Grabher as a characteristic of new market structures in some traditional branches in the federal state of Brandenburg because of the integration of the key players into external, vertical networks of enterprises (which usually have their headquarter and their R&D-capacities mostly in the old federal states), and a fragmentation of the remaining endogenous potentials and little regional networking dynamics (Grabher/Stark 1997: 107ff.).

Looking at the strategic networking and the market dominance of such key-players, we notice that East German entrepreneurs have four possibilities: a) conscious, partial cooperation with parts of this relevant structures by disregarding own innovative

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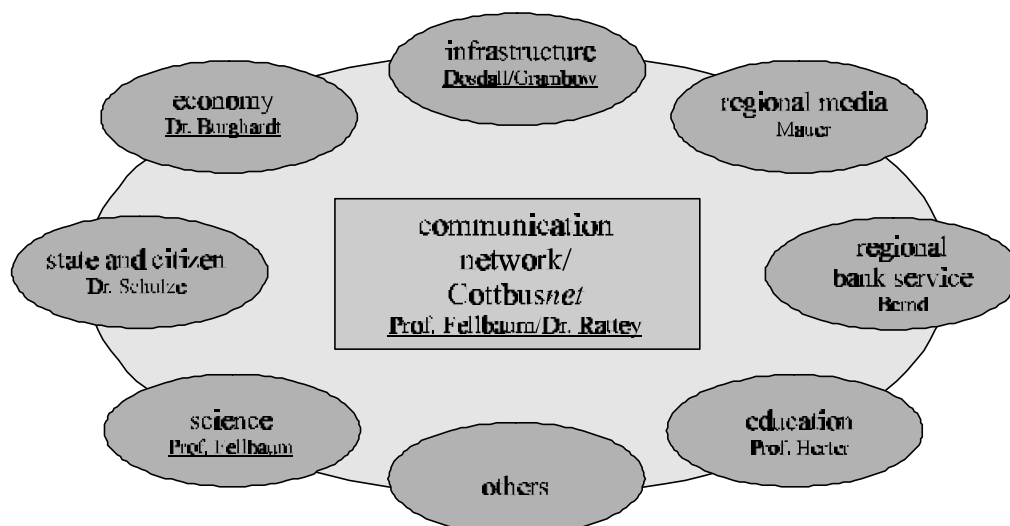
<sup>7</sup> Such problems are mainly the lack of capital, little regional demand, poor moral payment behavior of the clients, disappearing of traditional markets (esp. in East Europe), and cooperation structures.

ambitions; b) a switch to remaining technological niches and secondary market segments, e.g. concentration on small purchaser; c) creation of partial, rather local or regional networks for specific, regional requirements, or d) changing to markets beyond the region or abroad.

The third possibility is only briefly outlined because of its linkage to the question of formalization and informalization. Indeed, we can find in the Land Brandenburg some smaller networks of new established IT-firms that work together with local public or scientific institutions. Like in the following example of the 'Cottbus net' such similar kinds of networks can even be found in places, cities or regions, where no global player until now has discovered and controlled the IT-market.

Initially, this society had been a loose combined communication net, an open forum to promote multimedia and telecommunication applications and services in various in-plant, public and private branch of business of the city and the region Cottbus. In the meantime, a society, moderated by the Technical University Cottbus, has emerged from this. It works directly in the development of a competitive net-infrastructure for enterprises of all sizes and for private households and wants to offer an attractive broad range of diverse services (online-citizen-information systems, electronic mail, tele-jobs, multimedia communications, product information and etc.).

Figure 2: From communication network Cottbus to Cottbusnet registered society e.V.



In general, most of the IT-enterprises from Brandenburg neither reach the necessary capacities nor middle or long-term strategies in order to influence, formatively, the creation of greater strategic networks or structures in the transition to an information society in the federal state of Brandenburg. An aggravating effect results from the parallelism, isolation, and lack of mutual knowledge of encroaching initiatives in this branch of business, as well as from the absence of a concrete political conception of the federal state Brandenburg to pave the way into the information society.

A crucial aspect in the divergent chance structures between endogenous and exogenous, like between a lot of West Berlin and East German new IT-firms, is connected with the firm size itself. For a better understanding of the dimensions and chance structures an overview is offered of the actual number of enterprises in this branch of business in our region of research, Berlin-Brandenburg. This overview is, in general, considered as being difficult especially in this innovative and dynamic area. However, on the basis of a series research projects (partly of M. Weber, see Weber 1996), some secure estimates for the East-German IT-sector do exist. The total number of the IT-enterprises (including East Berlin) is estimated to be approximately 7,000; the total number of IT-employees in the new federal states (and Eastern Berlin) is estimated to a range from 75,000 to a maximum of 85,000 persons. These numbers concern almost exclusively enterprises founded after 1990. The federal state of Berlin had, in the mid 90's, a potential of enterprises and employees in the IT-branch corresponding approximately to that of the free state of Saxony. Berlin and Saxony are in this regard placed well ahead of the other new federal states.

Table 1: Distribution of IT-enterprises according to size

Year	Size (number of employees)							Total
	1-<5	5-<10	10-<20	20-<50	50-<100	100-<200	≥200	
1996	49	126	112	78	20	13	11	409
1995	47	52	43	32	10	5	5	194
1994	833	606	392	195	74	32	24	2156
1993	47	64	28	15	2	3	0	159
Total	976	848	575	320	106	53	40	2918

Table 2: Regional distribution within East Germany's IT-industry

Federal state	B	S	T	BB	SA	MWP	Total
Number of companies	1654	1592	707	547	450	365	5315

B – Berlin; S – Saxony; T – Thuringia; BB – Brandenburg; SA - Saxony-Anhalt; MWP – Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania

Table 3: Regional distribution of employees within East Germany's IT-industry

Federal state	B	S	T	BB	SA	MWP	Total
Total number of employees	19269	15420	9603	4129	4135	3059	55615
Number of companies	959	818	447	272	223	199	2918
Ø Employees	20,09	18,85	21,48	15,18	18,54	15,37	19,06

B – Berlin; S – Saxony; T – Thuringia; BB – Brandenburg; SA - Saxony-Anhalt; MWP – Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania



Source: own calculations, based on the database of M. Weber.

The former GDR-structures in this area have almost completely disappeared due to closings of academies and scientific institutions and relocations of R&D-areas in the course of privatizations of enterprises and the liquidation of former municipal institutions. Therefore, not even a basis for establishing larger dimension foundations of enterprises remained. The newly set up IT-enterprises since 1990 are mainly businesses of small and very small size, which on average employ less than 10 employees. Tables 1 to 3 show the results of surveys of enterprises in various years, which have been the basis of the estimation (compare Weber 1996)

Both with regard to the number of companies and the number of employees, Berlin takes the lead. Brandenburg takes the last position, regarding the average employment figures, and at a middle position regarding the stock of firms (ahead of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Sachsen-Anhalt).

The general picture of our research region is like that of David and Goliath: The potential of IT-enterprises in Berlin regarding both number of companies and employees is several times higher than that of Brandenburg (the latter having approximately 700 to 800 firms without the media branch). Little about that has been changed by transferring IT-companies from Berlin to the surrounding areas, which was motivated by smaller costs.

The general picture shows: less than 7% of the East-German IT-enterprises have more than 50 employees; a third employ a maximum of 5 persons; more than 60% do not go beyond 10 employees.

This structure of staff size has consequences for the strategy- and networking ability of East-German IT-enterprises. Often one person is responsible for management, marketing, networking and R&D/technology development. The result is an extremely restricted time budget of East German entrepreneurs which explains, why they learned quickly to attempt different schemes of networking more and more critically and with distance, in respect to time consumption and low productivity.

### **3. Diverging relevance structures in entrepreneurship between endogenous and exogenous actors**

The situation here described, the diverging chance structures and real functioning networks in the IT-scene in Berlin and Brandenburg, should not be understood simply as a quasi-given structural frame, but as a component of permanent interaction among the participating persons/entrepreneurs. Following this concept, the reproduction of this situation and its possible variations result from everyday mutual experiences and perceptions of the entrepreneurs from Berlin and Brandenburg.

To further illustrate that latter observation, there are reportedly a few aspects of our interviews that are relevant to uncover differences in proceeding and moreover, in informalization attitudes between exogenous and endogenous IT-founders. The diverging priorities in goals and sense of entrepreneurial activities, including the diverging perceptions of the economic behavior of the other, seemed to us especially worth discussion.

In fact, in our sample, the sharpest divergences in these relevant structures of entrepreneurial action were not found between successful or less successful entrepreneurs, and also not with the location of the enterprise (Berlin or Brandenburg). The main dimension of diversities in the individual entrepreneurial relevance structures were found between entrepreneurs from a western or eastern socialization, e.g. between exogenous and endogenous types of actors. That is why two illustrations are introduced (see figure 4 and 5 for the East-German case A. B. and West-German case C. D.) to clarify how different particular perceptions of the market can be explained by diverging latent structures of interpretation (*Deutungsmuster*), and how it finds expression also in different patterns of action. If we consider informalization attitudes as depending of relevance structures for the individual, then we find in these sets of patterns some explanation for the mentioned firstly diverging informalization attitudes.

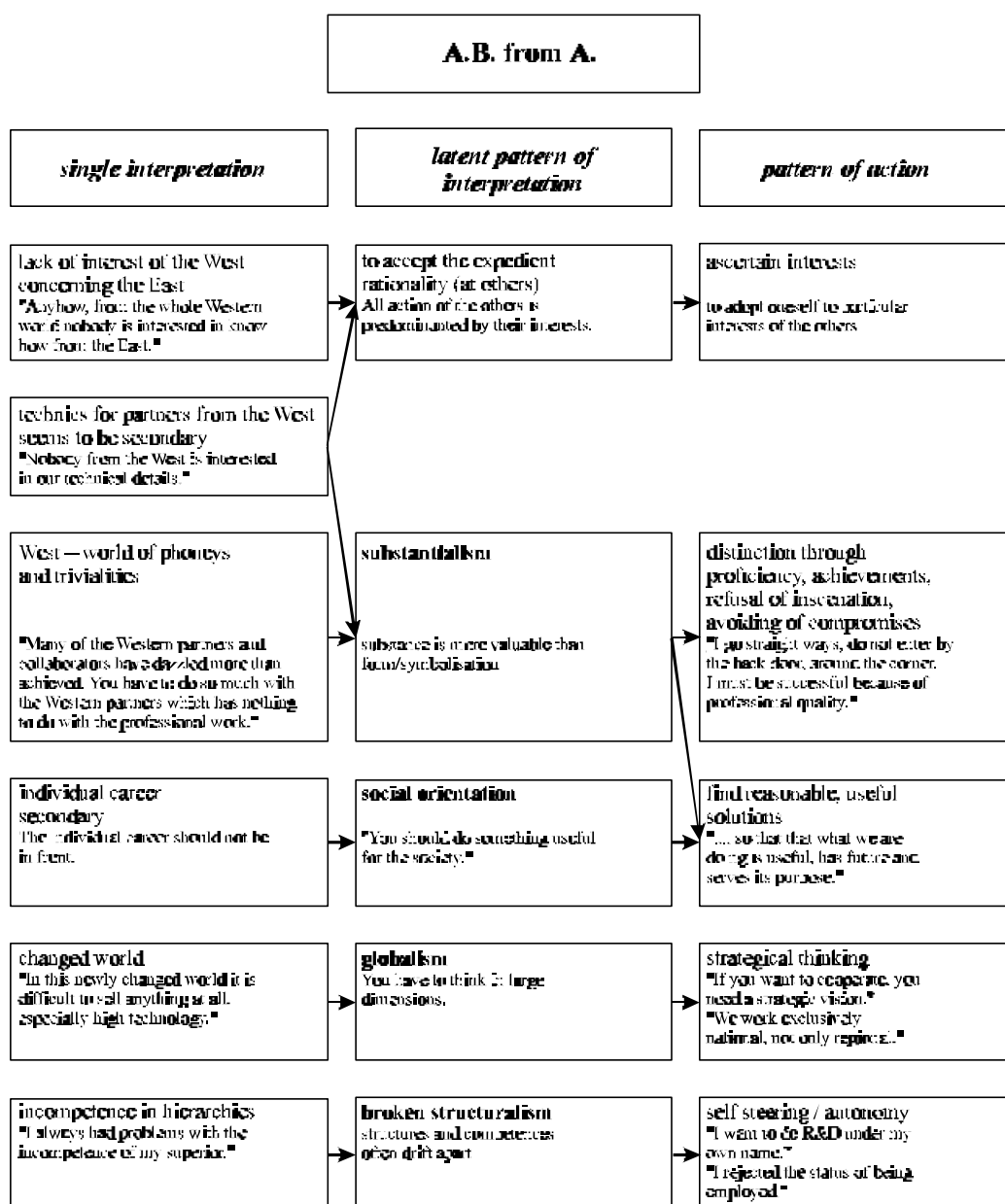
Both illustrated cases here (A.B. and B.C.) that established IT-firms between 1990 and 1993 in the surrounding of Berlin represent successful types of entrepreneurs who are going currently enlarging their enterprise from small to medium and their regional, national, and international market activity.

In this, two figures demonstrate (see below) three different analytical levels concerning the entrepreneurial action: firstly, on the left, the single, often explicit formulated impressions, perceptions or expectations; secondly, in the middle, the extracted latent sense structures or repeating patterns of interpretation (*Deutungsmuster*); and thirdly, on the right side of the scheme, the resulting action patterns.

A.B., *socialized in Eastern Germany*, reveals several explicitly deviant cognitions between East- and West German economic action and cooperation behavior. A.B. experienced his Western partners as not really being interested in know-how coming from the East (but more in the sales and client networks of the East-German partners). He got the impression that technology is secondary to the Western partner; but, for him, it is the primary starting point, both for searching partners and clients. He, himself, achieves (and holds this true for his other Eastern clients), "that the project itself works well, that the solution we install is technically good, that it works, that it is useful, that capacities of funds are not wasted, and that all we do is reasonable, has future, and serves its purpose" (Interview A.B.). This particular substantiality can hardly be found in the appearance of his Western partners. He experienced that such argumentations are ineffective in the West (but he does not really know why).

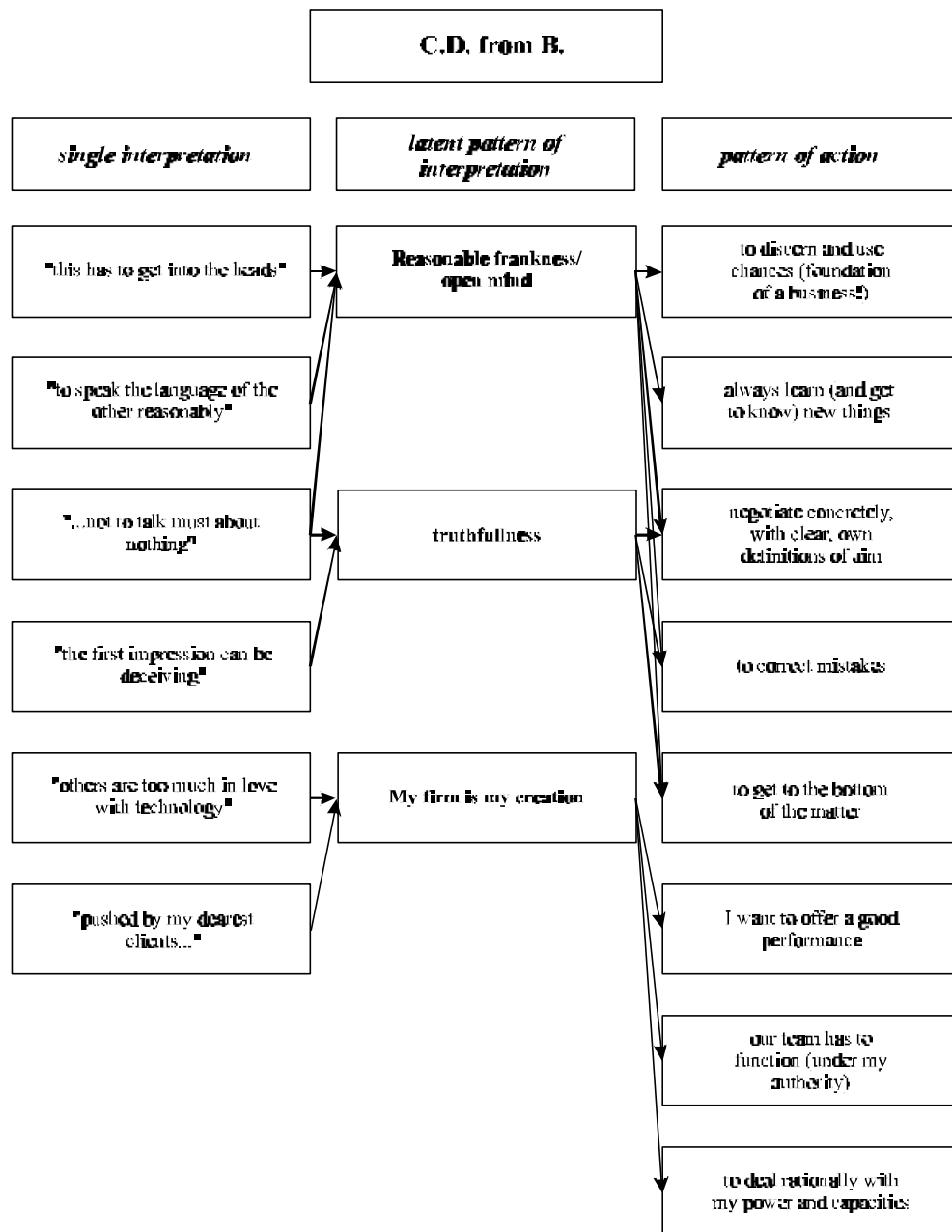
The world there seems to belong to the virtuoso of self-marketing and trivialities. He finds it repulsive that the West at first "thinks about the image that the enterprise has, which should be bright. The outward appearance of the software-programs, therefore not whether they are good or not but how they appear outwardly...and that the personal contacts first have to develop, that you have to talk about everything you can think of--and tennis and whatsoever". (Interview A.B.) Networking and small talk beyond the actual object of negotiation, social techniques of distinctions, strategies of advertisement and marketing - this is all not only difficult for him and seen as a burden, like on a dance floor, where one is not comfortable, but takes a lot of time (which one hardly has) and seems to neglect the subject and the main purpose.

Figure 3: A.B. from A.



C.D., *socialized in Western Germany*, puts special emphasis on reasonable frankness and truthfulness. He endeavors to really understand the language of the other one and does not want to talk much about nothing (therefore, a conscious differentiation of a rather as being normal assumed behavior). He concedes that the first impression (especially concerning partners from the East) can be misleading, yet criticize their weak goal orientation of their own negotiations. He also considers it as their mistake to be "too much in love with technology". His main work is not the technical solution but his business (as a whole and as an economic organism). Finally, he subordinates its development to the demands of his "favorite clients" and is not set on the technical idea or direction. Therefore, his action is dominated by constant flexibility and correction; the action of the East-German A.B., however, by a strategic-global approach.

Figure 4: C.D. from B.



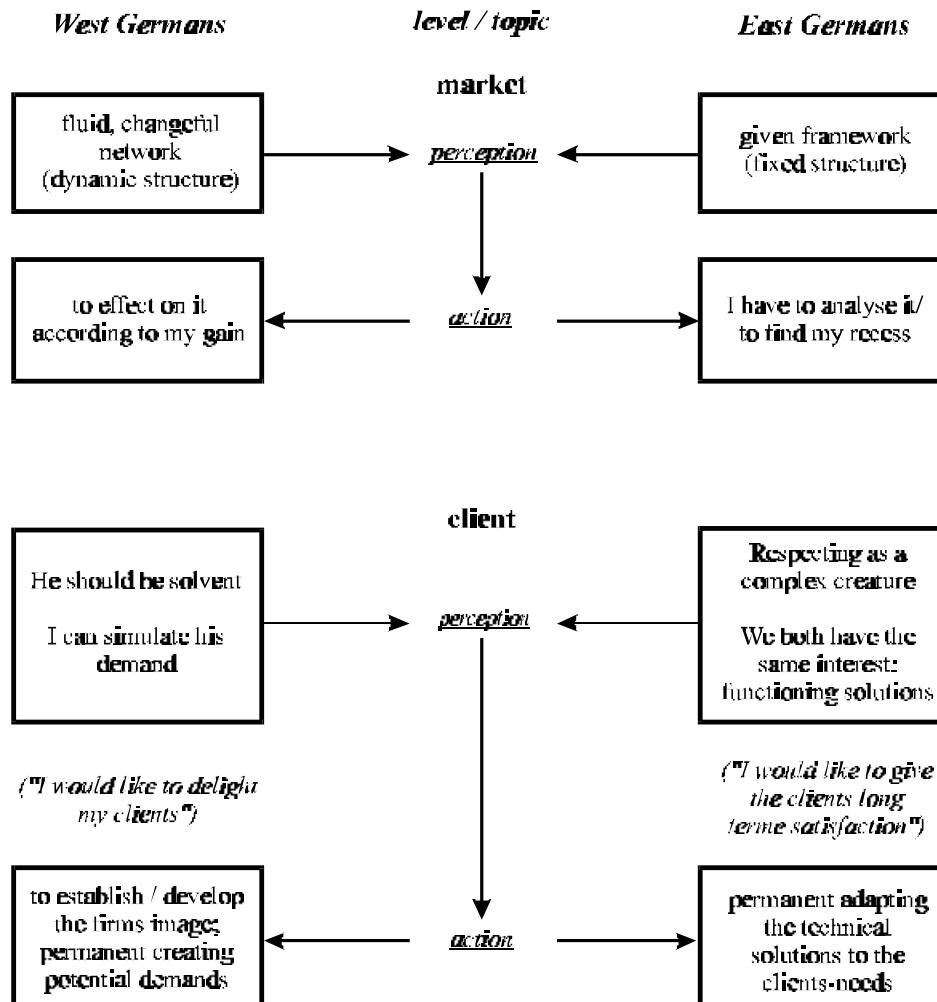
The East German contemplates great structures and fails to notice easily the slightest opportunity. Because of his refusal to accept techniques of distinction and self-presentation, which are in the West regarded for his social being as appropriate, his Western partner assumes that he is indecisive and observes a lack of a suitable role behavior in and outside the firm.

These kinds of assumptions and perceptions occurred in similar ways several times in our interviews and can, by no means, be interpreted as being coincidental or unique. A.B. and C.D. represent clear cases or types in our sample.

If we try to compare these two types along with the main differences in entrepreneurial action, we find diverging patterns of perception and action concerning two essential economic categories: what differs between our exogenous and endogenous

actors is the comprehension of the market, and the client as economic phenomena. Figure 5 tries to illustrate these diverging patterns of perception and action in a very rough scheme:

Figure 5: Diverging patterns of perception and action between West German and East German entrepreneurs



These diverging patterns of perception and action indeed arise from diverging social experiences, ties, and normative sets during the main socializations phases of these groups of actors. The western entrepreneurs grew up in an economic efficient functioning system where social prestige was connected with individual success and financial welfare, where people could rely on personal and economic freedom, and where they early learned to be self responsible for the own biography and for the looking for chance structures. The eastern entrepreneurs were socialized in a much closer and regulated state-socialist society where the individual career was not the main orientation, but the utility of action inside social groups or the society as a whole. Surely, there can be found trends to the official, ideological founded norms of solidarity or collectivism. However, much stronger personality structures and patterns of perception were formed about the everyday experiences of living and

working together in the embeddedness of life-world (*Lebenswelt*) in all its explicit and implicit influences and normative prerequisites. Here, in social structures without deep hierarchies or widely differentiated chance structures or spaces for individual self-management, people learned to distinguish themselves and develop trustful relationships through experience, competence, and may be creative ideas to solve the permanent problems of an inefficient economic system.

Since the transformation, the West German entrepreneur type focuses on the Market whereas the East German entrepreneur type remains substantially orientated. They speak the same language, but they have mentally different latent sense structures concerning the goals and the normative horizons of entrepreneurial action itself. I would hardly agree that these results seem to be typical only of the type of engineer-entrepreneur in our sample because both the East and West German interviewees have similar professional backgrounds.

#### 4. Summary

One methodological note first: This contribution tried to use qualitative analyses of interpretation patterns for explaining diverging patterns of informalization between endogenous and exogenous actors in the East German transformation. If the informal itself is understood as related to the relevance structures in individual action, then this kind of hermeneutical study can also help discover and explain different attitudes of informalization in different groups of actors in other transformational contexts.

A main topic of the study of the informal deals with the interpersonal networking, especially as a dimension for using social capital in transformational societies. What was found in the East German transformation case in the innovative IT-branch was an weaker than expected attitude at the endogenous level; East German actors tend to use social ties, social capital and personal networks. What can be found here, in a more general sense, is the phenomenon that the informalization attitudes depend on a dual frame of perception: firstly, the usefulness of social or political capital is limited by the given dominant structures of chances and balances of power of the different groups of actors (which also seems to be explicitly clear to the actors); and secondly, the individual attitudes and implementation of capital are embedded in the hierarchies of entrepreneurial goals, in the individual relevance structures, stimulated or limited by normative sets (as implicit, latent working patterns for perception and action, which hardly can be "discussed" or consciously changed ).

The actual result of this dual frame of perception of informal attitudes in the East German transformation process is an effect of reinforcing better chance structures and networking successes for the exogenous, rather than for the endogenous actors. This result explains why the economic dynamic in the region Berlin-Brandenburg can only partly be used or supported by East German entrepreneurs, and why we find a

picture of torn innovative landscape, too. The lack of reciprocity between exogenous and endogenous actors at the moment does not work in favor for the endogenous actors and forces them to assimilate almost into dominant patterns of action (while the deeper patterns of perception, the latent sense structures won't change so quickly).

But, perhaps this is not the only possible direction of learning. If the new innovative branches have to enforce elements of technical ingenuity in the entrepreneurial action itself and conform scientific approaches, as it sounds in some new market observations, then the scientific knowledge focused type of our endogenous entrepreneurs can find and use new opportunities to make their deeper entrepreneurial motivations more productive.



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